

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2709
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AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
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AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NICOSIA
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, MPOL, IS, LEB
SUBJECT: SCATHING ANALYSIS OF LEBANON POLICY

1. THE FOLLOWING COMMENTARY, ENTITLED "THE LEBANON FIASCO",
APPEARED IN HAARETZ ON APRIL 18. AUTHORED BY DR. ZEEV
STERNHELL, CHAIRMAN OF THE POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT
OF THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY, IT CONSTITUTES THE MOST
DEVASTATING CRITIQUE OF THE LEBANESE OPERATION THAT WE HAVE
SEEN.

2. ENCOMPASSING MOST OF THE NEGATIVE COMMENTS ON THE LITANI
OPERATION WHICH HAVE BEEN VOICED IN DISPARATE QUARTERS,
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IT IS UNIQUE (AND IN THE LOCAL CONTEXT, EXTREME) IN THAT
IT WEAVES THE VARIOUS THREADS OF CRITICISM INTO A BLANKET
ATTACK ON THIS MOST IMPORTANT POLITICAL-MILITARY VENTURE
UNDERTAKEN BY THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT.
THUS, WHILE IN ITS PARTS IT IS REPRESENTATIVE OF
WHATEVER CRITICISM HAS BEEN HEARD HERE, THE ARTICLE
AS A WHOLE DOES NOT REFLECT ANY SIGNIFICANT

PUBLIC OPINION SECTOR (EVEN SHELLI AND MAPAM HAVE BEEN RESTRAINED IN THEIR COMMENT).

3. IN A CONVERSATION ON APRIL 19 NRP KNESSET MEMBER DAVID GLASS (GAL) NOTED THAT WHILE MANY, IF NOT MOST, KNESSET MEMBERS HAVE MISGIVINGS, AND SOME ARE PRIVATELY VERY CRITICAL, HE AND OTHER MK'S--WHETHER OUT OF FEAR OF APPEARING UNPATRIOTIC OR FOR REASONS OF COALITION DISCIPLINE--HAVE NOT BEEN AS FORCEFUL IN THEIR OPPOSITION TO THE LEBANESE OPERATION AS THEIR PUBLIC DUTY REQUIRED. THE VERY MUTED PUBLIC AND KNESSET CRITICISM HAS NOT BEEN INDICATIVE, HE SAID, OF THE DEPTH AND BREADTH OF RESERVATIONS OF GOVERNMENT POLICY. GLASS WENT ON TO SAY THAT THESE WIDESPREAD RESERVATIONS WILL NOT BE TRANSLATED INTO A POLITICAL ATTACK ON THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT; THE TIME FOR ANY SUCH TRANSFORMATION HAS ALREADY PASSED.

4. NOTE: DR. STERNHELL, ALONG WITH OTHER YOUNG ACADEMICS, MOST OF THEM AT THE HEBREW UNIVERISTY IN JERUSALEM, IS IDENTIFIED WITH THE LEFT, SARID WING OF THE LABOR PARTY. BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED: THE ARTICLE READS AS FOLLOWS:

5. THE LITANI OPERATION HAS DEVELOPED INTO ONE OF ISRAEL'S MOST SERIOUS FAILURES IN RECENT YEARS. IF WE ARE TO GO ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT THE OCCUPATION OF SOUTHERN LEBANON LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WAS NOT SIMPLY THE RESULT OF AN INDIGNANT OUTBURST, UNDERSTANDABLE IN ITSELF, FOLLOWING THE COASTAL BUS ASSAULT, BUT A PLANNED AND CONTROLLED OPERATION, THE CONCLUSION TO BE DRAWN IS THAT HITHERTO, NOT EVEN ONE OF THE OBJECTIVES THAT WOULD COME TO MIND HAVE BEEN REALIZED.

6. IF WE ARE, FURTHERMORE, TO ASSUME THAT AN OPERATION OF SUCH DIMENSIONS SHOULD ENCOMPASS AN OVERVIEW OF THE MIDDLE EAST DISPUTE, THEN THE BANKRUPTCY OF ISRAEL'S POLICYMAKERS IS MORE PROMINENT THAN EVER. NOW IS THE TIME TO EXAMINE THE SIGNIFICANCE AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE LITANI OPERATION.

7. THE MOPPING UP OPERATION WAS LABELLED THE LITANI OPERATION... TO LEGITIMIZE POST FACTUM THE IDF DECISION TO TAKE UP POSITIONS ON THE BANKS OF THE LITANI. NOW AN ACCEPTED TITLE, IT COVERS UP A NUMBER OF DISAGREEABLE FACTS. FIRST OF ALL IT COVERS UP THE FACT THAT THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT HAS FOUND ITSELF IN CONTROL OF SOUTHERN LEBANON WITHOUT HAVING EITHER PLANNED OR PREPARED FOR IT. AFTER ALL, THE PROFESSED AIM WAS TO BEAT THE TERRORISTS AND STABILIZE A SECURITY BELT OF SOME TEN KMS., CLEAR OF HOSTILE FORCES. EVERY GALILEE CHILD WILL TELL YOU THAT THE SHELLS LANDING NEAR THEIR HOMES ARE FIRED

FROM A TERRITORY NORTH OF THE LITANI. THE QUESTIONS IS,
HOWEVER, HOW DID IT HAPPEN THAT ISRAEL FOUND HERSELF, WITHIN
A FEW HOURS, IN CONTROL OF A TERRITORY SHE HAD NO INTENTION
OF OCCUPYING?

8. A MOST DISCONCERTING REALITY APPEARS TO BE COMING TO LIGHT
HERE-IF THERE IS TRUTH IN THE REPORTS COMING AT A GROWING
RATE. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS, PERHAPS THE EARLY FIFTIES,
THE POLITICAL LEVEL HAS LOST CONTROL OVER A MILITARY
OPERATION OF BOTH POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE. ...YET
EVEN IF THE OCCUPATION OF SOUTHERN LEBANON WAS NOT SIMPLY
PROMPTED BY THE LOSS OF CONTROL OVER DEVELOPMENTS IN THE
FIELD, OR BY NOT KNOWING HOW TO END THE AFFAIR, BUT ALSO BY
A DESIRE TO COVER UP RELATIVE FAILURE IN ANOTHER FIELD,-
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THE IDF HAS NOT CRUSHED THE PLO FIGHTING FRAMEWORKS, NOR
HAS IT HARMED THE MORALE OF THE PALESTINIAN ORGANIZATIONS.

9. THE MANNER IN WHICH POLITICAL DECISIONS WERE MADE IN SO
SIMPLE A MILITARY OPERATION, EXPOSED TO NONE OF THE TERRIBLE
YOM KIPPUR STRESS AND PRESSURE CONDITIONS, SHOULD SERVE AS A
RED LIGHT OF WARNING TO ISRAELI PUBLIC OPINION, BECAUSE THAT
COULD ALSO HAVE BEEN THE WAY THE NEXT WAR WOULD BE CONDUCTED,
IF IT BREAKS OUT.

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10. IN THIS MINI-WAR ISRAEL WASTED HER DETERRENT POTENTIAL ON THE
NORTHERN FRONT. EVER SINCE THE TERRORISTS TOOK UP POSITIONS
IN SOUTHERN LEBANON, AND ESPECIALLY SINCE THE OUTBREAK OF THE
CIVIL STRIFE, THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENTS TOOK CARE TO AVOID
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LARGE SCALE MILITARY OPERATIONS; THEY KNEW THAT AFTER
TAKING THE AREA UP TO THE LITANI, ALL THERE WAS LEFT FOR
ISRAEL TO DO WAS TO FIGHT A TOTAL WAR. ON THE OTHER HAND,
THE CONSTANT THREAT OF MASSIVE INTERVENTION WAS A DETERRENT
WHICH GUARANTEED THAT BOTH SYRIA AND THE TERRORISTS WOULD
BE FORCED TO ABIDE BY THE RULES OF THE GAME, RULES WHICH
ISRAEL WOULD NOT FIND INCONVENIENT. THUS THE IDF HAD
PRACTICAL CONTROL OVER ALL THE AREAS NEAR THE BORDER,
SUCCESSFULLY AVOIDING UNCONTROLLED ESCALATION. NOW THE
BALANCE OF POWER HAS BEEN TIPPED AGAINST ISRAEL. THE
TERRORISTS FIND THAT THEY ARE ABLE TO EXIST WITH THE
INVOLVEMENT OF THE IDF AND TO GUARD THE BULK OF THEIR FORCE
IN THE FACE OF THE ISRAELI WAR MACHINE. ONCE AGAIN, IT HAS
BEEN SHOWN THAT A MASSIVE MILITARY ATTACK ON A GUERRILLA
MOVEMENT IS NOT NECESSARILY EFFECTIVE. ABOVE ALL, THE WORLD
NOW KNOWS THAT ISRAEL DOES NOT HAVE THE POLITICAL FORCE TO
LIQUIDATE THE TERRITORIAL BASE OF THE PLO. CONSEQUENTLY,
THE ISRAELI INVASION HAS CONSOLIDATED THE INTER-ARAB
AND INTERNATIONAL STATUS OF THE PLO; SOUTHERN LEBANON WILL
CONTINUE TO BE A TERRITORIAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE CONTINUED
REORGANIZATION OF THE PLO FORCES WHICH WILL
CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN SOME SORT OF AUTOMATIC FRAMEWORK UNDER
UN PROTECTION. IN THAT SENSE, THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT HAS
CONTRIBUTED ENORMOUSLY TO THE INCREASE OF PALESTINIAN SELF

CONFIDENCE AND THE PRESTIGE OF THE PLO. NO DOUBT WE SHALL LIVE TO SEE HOW THE TERRORISTS DEVELOP THE MYTH OF SOUTHERN LEBANON AS THEY DID AFTER THE KARAME OPERATION. IN MATTERS SUCH AS THESE THE IMAGE MATTERS MORE THAN DOES THE FACT. ISRAEL HAS EQUALLY CONTRIBUTED TO THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE PLO STATUS AS AN INDEPENDENT NATIONAL ELEMENT WHICH ENJOYS THE RECOGNITION OF THE UN AND THE GREAT POWERS. FROM ISRAEL'S VIEWPOINT, THE ENTRY OF THE UN FORCES IS ABSOLUTELY NEGATIVE. THE PRESENCE OF SCANDINAVIAN, FRENCH AND IRANIAN UNITS, ALL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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REPRESENTING COUNTRIES FRIENDLY TO THE PLO WILL LIMIT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE IDF IN THE FUTURE, POSSIBLY CAUSING AN UNNECESSARY CLASH WITH THE UN AND THE POWERS REPRESENTED AT THE SECURITY COUNCIL.

11. AS FOR ISRAEL'S ALREADY STRAINED RELATIONS WITH THE US, THE INVASION HAS ADDED ONE MORE QUITE SUPERFLUOUS ASPECT. THIS REFERENCE IS NOT TO THE CBU AFFAIR, BUT TO ISRAEL'S ENTIRE SYSTEM OF RELATIONS WITH WASHINGTON. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS, THE US HAS TAKEN A POLITICAL LINE IN ABSOLUTE CONTRADICTION TO THE POSITION OF THE ISRAELI FIRST. IN MANY WAYS, HOWEVER, THE GREATEST DAMAGE HAS BEEN DONE TO ISRAEL'S SELF-IMAGE. HUNDREDS OF INNOCENT CIVILIANS WERE KILLED IN THE LITANI OPERATION, AND THOUSANDS WERE LEFT WITHOUT A ROOF OVER THEIR HEADS, TENS OF THOUSANDS BECAME REFUGEES, FOR A WHILE AT LEAST. THE WHOLE WORLD, EXCEPT FOR THE CITIZENS OF ISRAEL, WITNESSED THE SUFFERING OF THE CIVILIAN POPULATION, THE DESTRUCTION WHICH THE AIR FORCE HAS CAUSED. WE KNOW THAT IT WAS DONE IN THE LEGITIMATE AND NECESSARY AIM OF CUTTING OUR OWN LOSSES TO A MINIMUM.

12. THE FACT IS THAT ISRAEL'S MORAL IMAGE HAS BEEN GRAVELY DEFORMED AND THE FACT HAS FIXED ITSELF DEEPLY IN THE HEARTS OF THE YOUNG SOLDIERS, NO LESS THAN IN THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF MILLIONS THE WORLD OVER. TO LIQUIDATE THREE HUNDRED TERRORISTS, EASILY REPLACED BY NEW RECRUITS FROM THE REFUGEE CAMPS, ISRAELI LEADERS DID NOT HESITATE TO BLACKEN ISRAEL'S IMAGE, IMMOBILIZE HER INDEPENDENT ABILITY TO OPERATE ON THE NORTHERN BORDER, AND DAMAGE HER INTERNATIONAL CREDIBILITY AND STATUS.

13. HERE WAS THE FIRST SERIOUS CRISIS WHICH MENACHEM BEGIN AND HIS GOVERNMENT HAD TO FACE: IT CANNOT EASILY BE SAID THAT THEY HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN INCREASING OUR CONFIDENCE IN THEIR ABILITY TO NAVIGATE THE NATIONAL SHIP. UNQUOTE
LEWIS

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